

Mind your mental health this winter



Winter months can be mired by miserable weather, lack of sunlight, short days, dark mornings, ill-health and the burden of money worries after over-spending at Christmas. Not to mention the added stress that COVID is contributing this year.

'Winter blues' can have a considerable impact on employee wellbeing and mental health. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) cases rise during the winter months along with increased reports of depression and anxiety.

Here we look at how to spot the signs of SAD and how to get help.



A spotlight on Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)



KEY FACT: One in three people in the UK suffers from SAD

In non-seasonal depression, people tend to sleep less and eat less. Whereas with SAD, they usually sleep more and eat more - almost like they are in hibernation. Other common symptoms of SAD are similar to normal depression but with more prevalence from September to April.

Spotting the signs

- A persistent low mood
- Lack of energy
- Difficulty concentrating or achieving deadlines
- Lack of interest or pleasure in usual activities
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Tearfulness
- Becoming irritable
- Less desire to be sociable



Self-help for SAD sufferers

Making small changes to your lifestyle can help alleviate symptoms:

- Spend more time outdoors in daylight
- Take regular cardio exercise outside
- Work in bright conditions such as near a window
- Eat a healthy balanced diet rich in vitamin D (the sunshine vitamin)
- Tell family and friends that you have SAD and explain how it affects you so they can offer support
- Take winter holidays in sunny places
- Consider joining a support group - knowing you're not alone can be a comfort



Useful resources:

- www.bupa.co.uk/health-information/mental-health/sad
- www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/seasonal-affective-disorder-sad/self-care/



Brighter days ahead

Here are some practical tips and general advice to help ward off the winter blues:

GET SOME EXERCISE: Even a brisk 10-minute walk can have a positive effect on mood. Physical activity plays a vital role in treating depression and anxiety.

EAT WELL: Improving your diet may give you more energy, clarity and positivity.

SLEEP TIME: Switch off electronic devices an hour before bedtime and aim for 8 hours sleep a night.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS: Reap the free rewards of fresh air and nature - walk the dog, do gardening, go for a jog or stroll during your lunch hour, ditch the car and take a bike instead... all great ways of fighting off the mood-dampening dark mornings and evenings.

AVOID EXCESSIVE DRINKING: It may seem like a quick fix but the answer is never at the bottom of the bottle and a hangover will make things seem worse.

MAKE NEW FRIENDS: Combat loneliness by joining an online evening class as a way of widening your social circle.

BE KIND: A brilliant mood enhancer for you and the recipient, whether it's baking a cake for an elderly neighbour or making that long overdue phone call. Everyone wins with kindness.

BE MINDFUL: Try yoga or meditation or even just living in the moment can help lift spirits and pause the stresses of a busy life.



The final word of support

Whether you or someone you know is suffering from anxiety or loneliness, SAD or suicidal thoughts, remember there is always someone who can help. Always.

If life ever feels overwhelming, never suffer in silence. Speak to your GP or friends and family. They, and you, will always be glad you did.

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